

*Philosophia's Dress: Prayer in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy*¹

Stephen Blackwood

UNIVERSITY OF KING'S COLLEGE

A great necessity is solemnly ordained for you, if you do not want to deceive yourselves, to do good, when you act before the eyes of a judge who sees all things.²

It is not immediately apparent how these final lines of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* offer any consolation. What comfort is an exhortation to virtue to a just man falsely accused now awaiting his sentenced execution? Boethius' consolation actually begins when Lady Philosophy, clothed in a dress that is the work of her own hands, appears to him in his sorrow. With her dress she wipes away the tears that cloud his eyes from recognizing her as the teacher of his youth. Later, in the fifth book of the *Consolation*, when he cannot see that divine foreknowledge preserves human freedom, she gives him a formula that distinguishes and relates different kinds of seeing, different powers of knowing. This formula is the key to unlocking both the significance of the dramatic story and the structure of the philosophical argument. Drama and argument, poetry and dialectic, however, are not alternative methods of consolation. Rather, Boethius' consolation is in *Philosophia's* weaving of these together, such that her dress comforts in sorrow and leads upwards to joy. This paper begins with a brief outline of the basic argument of the text, and then moves to a consideration of the formula of knowing and its psychological and theological principles.

1. This article is a development from my MA thesis (1999) for the Dalhousie Department of Classics. I owe a great debt to Dr. Wayne Hankey who supervised that thesis, gave crucial comments on this paper and, above all, first taught me *The Consolation of Philosophy*. I am also grateful to Naomi Blackwood, Eli Diamond, Alain Galonnier, Gary McGonagill and Daniel Watson for their help with this text. Finally, I would like to dedicate this paper to the Rev'd Canon Gary Thorne.

2. "Magna vobis est, si dissimulare non vultis, necessitas indicta prohibitatis, cum ante oculos agitis iudicis cuncta cernentis," 5, 6, 169–71. All quotations from the Latin text are taken from C. Moreschini's edition for *Bibliotheca Teubneriana* (Munich/Leipzig, 2000). Moreschini differentiates references to prose or metre sections of each chapter by using Arabic numerals for prose and roman numerals for metre. English translations (with one exception at 4, 6, 47–48) are those of E.K. Rand (*Boethius: The Theological Tractates, The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library, 74 [Cambridge, MA, 1973]).

At the *Consolation's* opening, Boethius laments his fall from the height of good fortune. That the virtuous are punished while the wicked prosper is for him proof that his virtue cannot secure him happiness. His statement of the injustices he has suffered is a list of external rewards such as reputation, riches, and honours which have been taken from him. In order to expose the nature of his unhappiness, however, Lady Philosophy overturns his sense of injustice by turning him upon himself. Whereas he thinks happiness has been taken from him, she maintains he has taken it from himself (1, 5,2–19). She blames not *fortuna* but his relation to *fortuna* as the cause of his unhappiness. He has, she argues, expected a constancy from fortune untrue to her nature (2, 1,25–59).

The argument of the second book is an examination of Boethius' false relation to fortune. She shows him that he has sought to possess a stable happiness in what cannot be either his to possess (2, 5,51–53), or stable in itself (2, 1,57–59). Thus, the discussion of office, honour, and pleasure as gifts of fortune has the ironic conclusion that bad fortune is better than good fortune. The untrue relation to the world, which good fortune allows, bad fortune reveals. In times of good fortune, there is the unconscious temptation to live in external goods, whereas in times of bad fortune the fleeting enjoyment of these unstable goods is revealed. Thus, in a reflection on the confusion of his external pursuits, Boethius is turned upon himself. In the removal of every external thing which he has mistaken for happiness, he is awakened to ask about what he actually desires.

In the first half of the third book this awakened self continues the negative reflection that strips it of externality. Boethius is now able to see through honour, office, rule, and riches to the goods sought in them as sufficiency, respect, power, celebrity, and pleasure (3, 2,68–72). Taking the reflection one step deeper, Boethius is able to see that, beyond all of these, what is sought is the simple good itself (3, 2,72–75). The consciousness of desire which has been awakened is expressed poetically at 3, II: the submissive captive lion, once having tasted blood bursts its bonds, just as the caged bird, having glimpsed her woods, sings for her return to them. As we shall see below, Boethius is able to recognize the simple good which he seeks only insofar as his own self is simplified, is collected from without. The argument up to this point has provided Boethius with a taste or glimpse of freedom, such that his pursuit of it will not relent until he has it in full possession.

The negative reflection is given its final form when the argument shows that the goods sought (sufficiency, power, fame, respect, and pleasure) are different in name but are of one substance.³ Yet, when sought separately

3. "Atqui illud quoque per eadem necessarium est sufficientiae, potentiae, claritudinis,

from each other, they do not even provide the good they appear to possess individually. Riches do not provide sufficiency, nor power satisfaction (3, 9,47–63). Lady Philosophy shows that the failure of human effort to attain the good is essential to human activity itself: “that which is simple and undivided by nature, human error divides and perverts from the true and perfect to the false and imperfect.”⁴

In the statement of the problem with the nature of human seeking, the form of true happiness, as the unified possession of all of the goods sought, appears (3, 9,71–73). Thus the negative reflection at its extreme knows the form of the happiness the self seeks. And yet, this rational movement toward a knowledge of happiness seems to be essentially inadequate to the end it seeks. At the very moment that he recognizes true happiness he knows he cannot attain it. What Boethius seeks is a way of bringing desire together with object, activity with fulfilment, and pathway with end.

At this point, Lady Philosophy and Boethius agree they must pray to the father of all things (3, 9,97–99). The central prayer which follows at 3, IX asks for the vision of God who is beginning, driver, leader (*dux*), pathway (*semita*) and end. In other words, the necessity of prayer is recognized when reason becomes conscious of the inadequacy of its dividing activity to the end it desires. In the act of prayer, reason desires to be raised above itself by the agency of the unity it seeks. At this point, however, the existence of this unity is known only implicitly. The argument that follows immediately after the central prayer brings this implicit assumption to a philosophical knowledge. Lady Philosophy explains that the very thinking of the imperfect relies on the existence of the perfect (3, 10,3–20). Thinking proceeds by way of a comparison of the imperfect with the perfect. In other words, the existence of the perfect has been necessary to the reasoning activity that stripped the self of its external attachment through a recognition of the imperfect, divided nature of the perceived goods.

The remainder of the second half of the third book is a positive examination of the good sought in a way appropriate to it. That is, Boethius is lifted from division to contemplate the good in its unity. Confident now that this first and perfect being exists, the argument is woven without seams (3, 12,77–106), so as not to fall from the simplicity that alone is sought. Moving deductively from its consideration of God as perfect and existent, it establishes that God is also the highest good, highest happiness, and at unity with Himself. At this point, the argument has come full circle and shows what Boethius

reverentiae, iucunditatis nomina quidem esse diversa, nullo modo vero discrepare substantiam,” 3, 9,38–42.

4. “Quod enim simplex est indivisumque natura, id error humanus separat et a vero atque perfecto ad falsum imperfectumque traducit,” 3, 9,10–12.

earlier doubted: that God rules all things by His goodness. This ought to be a happy conclusion because it meets perfectly the subjective movement of the earlier books. Because the good is the end actually and freely sought by the self, the happy result is that God disposes all things *fortiter suaviterque* (3, 12,60–61). Thus virtue and vice possess their respective reward and punishment internally. The good achieve what they desire in their possession of goodness (4, 3,20–22), while the wicked, who do not become good, therefore cease even to exist (4, 3,45–47). Boethius assents to the logic of the argument, but protests that it does not answer what caused his despair: that God's governance was not visible to him (4, 1,9–11). Whatever philosophy might say about the world, it seems to Boethius in his prison cell, that the good are punished for their goodness while the wicked are rewarded for their wickedness. The argument will have to answer Boethius' perception more directly if it is to provide him with more than a facile optimism.

Boethius' stubbornness in pursuing the matter presses Lady Philosophy to separate his limited, divided, and temporal perception of the world from the infinite and unmoving comprehension of the world in the divine simplicity of Providence (4, 6, esp.74–78). Whatever the external punishments and rewards of human action appear to be, Providence sees all time and orders all events absolutely towards the good, bringing good even out of evil (4, 6,184–86). Poetically, *Philosophia* explains God's ordering through the return of all things to their cause. She says that things do not endure [*durare*] "nisi converso rursus amore / refluant causae quae dedit esse [unless by means of love which has turned back they flow back to the cause which gave them being]" (4, VI,47–48).

Now, however, the argument appears to collapse under its own weight. The foreknowledge attributed to God in order to explain how His governance is total, seems to undermine the freedom of action which is the condition of the complaint about justice. Lady Philosophy solves the *aporia* through a simple epistemological rule: "everything which is known is not grasped according to its own power but rather according to the capability of those who know it."⁵ The phenomenological method of the *Consolation* is placed within a comprehensive epistemology, and the apparent hierarchy of beings that implies. By separating the objects from the faculties of knowing, Lady Philosophy claims that the object is only known relative to the kind of knowing.

She then distinguishes four faculties in the human soul: sense, imagination, reason, and intellect. Each of these faculties (*facultatem*) has a power

5. "omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui vim sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem," 5, 4,72–75.

(*vim*) which is proper to it. The activity of these powers is described either as seeing (*contueor*) or as knowing (*congnosco, comprehendo*). She explains that each of these faculties, therefore, look at (*contuetur*) their objects in different ways. For

sense examines the shape set in the underlying matter; imagination the shape alone without the matter; while reason surpasses this too, and examines with a universal consideration the specific form itself, which is present in single individuals. But the eye of intelligence is set higher still; for passing beyond the process of going round the one whole, it looks with the pure sight of the mind at the simple Form itself.⁶

However, the apparent contradiction between foreknowledge and freedom cannot be resolved simply by separating the faculties of knowing from each other. If the problem arose from a confusion between what is true of God and what seems true for us (that is, from a confusion of the kinds of knowing), then the solution must not only distinguish the kinds of knowing but also relate them. Therefore, the second part of Lady Philosophy's rule of knowledge is that "the higher power of comprehension embraces the lower, while the lower in no way rises to the higher."⁷ The second half of this formula enables our return to Boethius' inward journey, and to a consideration of the psychological and theological principles that underlie it.

Boethius' opening poem expresses his fall from good fortune, and the sorrow that accompanies it. Falsely accused and awaiting his execution in his prison cell, he is a long way from the height of popularity he enjoyed in Roman cultural, political, and intellectual life. He therefore despairs that such apparent injustice goes unpunished. However, Boethius' theme in the opening poem and early chapters is not limited to his own selfish interest. Rather, he takes his personal fall from happiness to have exposed the fundamental disorder of human affairs, the inconstancy of human life which cannot be reconciled with the human desire to live in that world.⁸ What under-

6. "Sensus enim figuram in subiecta materia constitutam, imaginatio vero solam sine materia iudicat figuram; ratio vero hanc quoque transcendit speciemque ipsam, quae singularibus inest, universalis, consideratione perpendit. Intellegentiae vero celsior oculus existit; supergressa namque universitatis ambitum, ipsam illam simplicem formam pura mentis acie contuetur," 5, 4,81-88.

7. "nam superior comprehendendi vis amplectitur inferiorem, inferior vero ad superiorem nullo modo consurgit," 5, 4,89-91.

8. For a very helpful examination of Boethius' view of contingency, see Ammonius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, trans David Blank, with Boethius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, trans. Norman Kretzmann, with essays by Richard Sorabji, Norman Kretzmann and Mario Mignucci (Ithaca, 1998). On contingency and divine knowledge, see Luca Obertello, *Proclus, Ammonius and Boethius on Divine Knowledge in Dionysius V* (1981): 127-64.

lies his complaint is thus a lived statement about the impossibility of a stable human happiness, a despair that one's actions and one's desires can be brought together. If virtue does not bring happiness then there is no self-possessed end for man in the temporal world.

The later problem between freedom and foreknowledge is therefore an inversion of the problem expressed in this opening lament. In the fifth book, Boethius cannot reconcile the simplicity of divine knowledge with the necessarily free judgment of temporal human reason. Here, in the first book, he cannot reconcile self-possession with the contingent nature of his sensible, imaginative perception. In other words, instead of collapsing top to bottom, that is, by judging freedom impossible because of the simplicity of the divine vision, here he collapses bottom to top, that is, by judging an inner simplicity (self-possession) impossible because of temporal contingency. In other words, in both moments of despair, contingency or freedom seem at odds with stable self-possession. If Boethius is to be consoled, *Philosophia* will have to show him that self-possession is possible in the contingent world, that there is hope for happiness in this life.

Relative to the total despair of human life that finds expression in the opening lament, the dramatic movement of the *Consolation* is essential. To Lady Philosophy, Boethius' complaint reveals that he has forgotten his true self. As the argument demonstrates, he has lost himself in external attachment. Her treatment of his malady is not, however, simply a matter of argument. Buffeted as he is by a "tumult of different emotions"⁹ she knows he is not ready for the strong medicine of pure argument, but needs the gentler touch of milder medicines. The aim of her treatment is not only to help him climb the rungs of her dress, from practical to theoretical matters. Her purpose is also to restore his soul to order, to integrate the various levels of his personality.¹⁰ She therefore treats his entire soul, and knows when he is ready for her varied medicines. Accordingly, she begins with her dress: she wipes away the tears of the prisoner who weeps and cannot recognize his doctor. To the orator she uses rhetoric,¹¹ to the musician she sings, to the father she speaks of prospering sons and to the husband of a faithful wife. To the logician and mathematician, she gives corollaries and precision, and to the lover of wisdom, she appears as Wisdom herself.¹²

9. "Sed quoniam plurimus tibi affectuum tumultus incubuit diversumque te dolor ira maeror distrahunt, uti nunc mentis es, nondum te validiora remedia contingunt," 1, 5,36–39.

10. On the structure and role of subjectivity in the *Consolation*, see W.J. Hankey, "Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem: Knower and known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Proslogion* of Anselm," *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Richmond, UK, 2001) 126–50.

11. At 2,2 Lady Philosophy even makes *Fortuna's* own arguments.

12. For another version of the formula that underlies Lady Philosophy's method—"a thing

The method is, to use Hadot's phrase, an *exercice spirituel* which aims at a "transformation de la vision du monde et à une métamorphose de la personnalité."¹³ From the point where Philosophy wipes the tears from his eyes, Boethius' journey is an ascent towards the true vision of God and himself. However, it is because she gently readies her patient for each step of the journey that he is capable of the ascent. Lady Philosophy watches his progress carefully and gives to him as he is ready to receive. That *Philosophia* rightly judges her patient's state is shown dramatically by his increased activity in relation to her. Whereas, in the first book, he does not recognize her until she clears his sight; at the beginning of the second, she needs only to pause to regain his attention. Whereas in the second book, her music has only a temporary soothing affect on his emotional life; at the beginning of the third, the sweetness of song has readied him to desire more direct argument.

The prisoner's recovery is also mirrored in the ordering of *Philosophia's* poetry and prose. In the early books the poetry precedes the prose, as his imagination needs restoration before his mind can follow argument. In the later books the order is reversed. He is able to understand the arguments without difficulty while the poetry and song remain a confirmation of them as nourishment to his senses and imagination.¹⁴ But why is this dramatic, poetic treatment efficacious? Why by her singing is the prisoner made ready for hard thinking? Why does her smile move him to go deeper into himself and higher into God?

We saw that the prayer at 3, IX is reason's recognition that it must be raised to the unity it seeks by that unity itself. This is a crucial moment in the *Consolation* because it indicates the spiritual exercise that governs the entire work. Reason's recognition of the unified good it seeks is simultaneous with its awareness of its inability to reach that good. That is, awareness of its own inadequacy is the strange gift reason receives in the face of its beloved, the infinite good. The prayer proceeds immediately out of this recognition. In other words, reason's recognition of its own inability to reach its end is what makes prayer necessary and possible. Only after the prayer is reason able to see that what it seeks is present throughout its seeking. Prayer is therefore reason's asking to be embraced by the good that moves it and yet

is known according to the mode of the knower"—see W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists" for *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages—A Doxographic Approach*, ed. Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen and Stephen Gersh (Berlin, 2002) 279–324.

13. Pierre Hadot, *Exercices Spirituel et Philosophie Antique* (Paris, 1981) 14.

14. Consider the words of Gerard O'Daly: "the poetry of the *Consolation* bridges the different times of the work's dramatic progress, so that the motifs anticipate their full development, and, in particular, cardinal themes are expressed but only fully appropriated in the detailed argument of subsequent prose sections." *The Poetry of Boethius* (Chapel Hill, 1991) 127.

lies beyond its reach. But how is it possible for reason to recognize the good it inadequately seeks? That prayer is recognized as necessary not only implies that this unity exists but also that reason must somehow be present to it, because it is reason that seeks it.

Lady Philosophy explains to Boethius that each power of comprehension embraces the ones below it. For example,

the intelligence, therefore, as it were looking down from above, by conceiving the Form distinguishes all the things subject [*subsumt*] to that Form, but only because of the way it comprehends the Form itself, which could not be known to anything else. For it knows the reason's universal, and the imagination's shape, and what is materially sensible, but without using reason, imagination, or the senses, but with one stroke of the mind.¹⁵

Without a relation between the powers of seeing there would be no coherence to the personality. Each of the higher faculties includes what the lower faculties know, and somehow this is what makes a movement between them possible. Intellect, therefore, has the unified comprehension that reason seeks but can also distinguish the universal that is properly reason's own. Each higher power therefore holds the lower powers in relation to itself. It is this presence of the lower in the higher that makes the prisoner's ascent possible. In other words, reason recognizes its fulfillment, its happiness, at the moment it turns to intellect above it, and in that turn knows its end to have been present all along. In the turn upward, therefore, we see not only that the higher includes the lower, but also that the higher is present in the lower. A reason which prays is made able to see its end as present in its activity. This conversion, this turning of reason upward to its principle, indicates the activity that fulfills the other aspects of the personality as well. Each kind of knowing finds its completion in being restored to a relation to what is above it. Though it belongs to reason alone to pray, the activity of each faculty is essentially the activity of conversion, of a kind of prayer, of turning upwards towards its principle. Thus, *Philosophia's* smile, her poetry, her rhetoric, and her song all help Boethius' senses and imagination to join in the upward movement.

She says that "since every judgement is the act of one judging, it must be that each performs his task not from some other's power but from his own."¹⁶

15. "intellegentia quasi desuper spectans concepta forma quae subsunt etiam cuncta diiudicat, sed eo modo quo formam ipsam, quae nulli alii nota esse poterat, comprehendit. Nam et rationis universum et imaginationis figuram et materiale sensibile cognoscit nec ratione utens nec imaginatione nec sensibus, sed illo uno ictu mentis formaliter, ut ita dicam, cuncta prospiciens," 5, 4,94–100.

16. "nam cum omne iudicium iudicantis actus existat, necesse est ut suam quisque operam non ex aliena sed ex propria potestate perficiat," 5, 4,114–16.

We have seen how reason turns to the unity of intellect. Were it not for this turning, the subsequent contemplation of the good in its unity would not be possible. Similarly, at the *Consolation's* opening, Boethius' eyes are filled with tears. Only when *Philosophia* wipes away his tears is he able to see her clearly. Her action restores his vision to wholeness, a completion proper to it. Only after his sensible sight is restored is his memory (imagination) awakened so that he recognizes this woman as the teacher of his youth. The restoration of sense to itself allows for the awakening of the imagination above it. Later, *Philosophia* knows her patient is not ready for argument because he is swayed to and fro by his affections (grief, anger and sorrow). Accordingly, she treats him with the gentler medicines of rhetoric and song. Only when the harmony of his soul resonates with the harmony of the song, that is, when his affections have been restored, does his reason awaken to argument. The sweetness of her song is still in his ears when he asks to move beyond image to universal (3,1). Each power of seeing, at the moment it is restored to itself, makes possible the soul's turn to the power above it.

One is now able to see the positive in the primarily negative movement of the first half of the *Consolation*. Despite the now evident short-sightedness of Boethius' opening tirade against human life, one now sees that his attachment to worldly things is used positively to free him from his despair. When he laments his losses, *Philosophia* reminds him of the well-being of those he loves most: his sons, wife and father in law (2, 4,5–31). Similarly, the reflection on the inability of the self to fulfill its desires leads to the recognition of the true good sought. The negative argument that exposes the inadequacy of temporal divided reasoning, is itself an argument made by a temporal and thus a divided reason. Finally, the form of true happiness appears at the very extreme of unhappiness. The activity of each level of the personality itself mediates the upward movement. Each kind of seeing has a positive content which makes possible the self's return to its principle. That each kind of seeing is necessary to this upward movement implies a hope that may answer Boethius' initial despair.

Looking at the early argument from this positive standpoint, however, renews the urgency of finding a solution to the crisis caused by the conflict between foreknowledge and freedom. When Boethius demands to see the working of providence in the lowest level of human affairs, the reason with which he asks the question is itself challenged by the answer. That is, human agency seems impossible against the omnipotence of Providence. Yet, not only reason is threatened by Providence; it would now seem that the omnipotence of the divine vision reduces not only reason, but also the free activity of the other ways of knowing to mere illusion, wishful thinking. The very activities that seemed to give the personality an inner integrity seem not

really to be the soul's activities at all. Whereas initially Boethius laments a lack of governance in human affairs; in the later argument, it seems that even that lament is forced upon him. In the opening poem, Boethius had at least the comfort of his own muses. Now, as we revisit the crisis of the fifth book, it seems the entirety of his upward movement is not his own, but forced by Providence.

Nonetheless, we should pause here and ask, why does Boethius insist on preserving the freedom with which he comes to his happiness? After having been moved from his earlier division to the simplicity of a vision of God (3, 12,94–106), why bother about the implications for the lower forms? Why worry about the ladder after reaching the highest level, the pathway after attaining the end, the circle after reaching the centre? The desire that moves the *Consolation* can only be satisfied if the self that desires is preserved in the satisfaction. Like Orpheus (3, XII), Boethius refuses to have his desire satisfied through its denial. Happiness cannot consist in merely recognizing the existence of the good his activity seeks but rather in a reconciliation between that good and the activity that seeks it. He demands that his happiness comprehend all levels of his personality, and therefore also the whole cycle from sorrow to joy, despair to happiness and oppression to freedom. For him, desire and possession, pathway and end must be one with each other.

The resolution is in Lady Philosophy's discussion of the Divine substance itself. So far as the kinds of knowing and seeing are related to each other, the entire movement depends on whether, and how, all the four kinds of human seeing are preserved in the divine vision. Lady Philosophy explains that eternity is the "whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life"¹⁷ God's being is thus by Him completely possessed in His infinite life. She says:

Whatever therefore comprehends and possesses at once the whole fullness of boundless life, and is such that neither is anything future lacking from it, nor has anything past flowed away, that is rightly held to be eternal, and that must necessarily both always be present to itself, possessing itself in the present, and hold as present the infinity of moving time.¹⁸

Therefore, the world and humanity are comprehended in the relations of God to Himself. Everything is in God according to His seeing. Thus the highest good that Boethius has sought is not one before which all finite

17. "Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio," 5, 6,9–10.

18. "Quod igitur interminabilis vitae plenitudinem totam pariter comprehendit ac possidet, cui neque futuri quicquam absit nec praeteriti fluxerit, id aeternum esse iure perhibetur idque necesse est et sui compos praesens sibi semper adistere et infinitatem mobilis temporis habere praesentem," 5, 6,24–29.

being dissolves, or to which it can find no relation.¹⁹ Rather than reduce the various levels of knowing to His essential unity, God sustains them in their integrity. Thus, in the highest seeing, all of the other powers of seeing are comprehended.²⁰ In this light, the final lines of the *Consolation* are not an exhortation to a blind moralism, but are rather an invitation to freedom, an affirmation of the integrity of human action. The forms of human soul are ultimately sustained in the divine self-relation because God's seeing of all things upholds the activity of every level below him.

This simple theological truth—that God's possession of Himself is complete—is what finally consoles Boethius. For God's seeing is not simply another rung in the ladder of cognition. *Philosophia's* epistemological formula has been shown to account for the movement of the soul, and the relation between its powers. Yet, it is only because the infinite, self-sufficient good contains everything below it that these lower activities can possess their desired ends. If human activity can imitate the divine self-possession, the happiness Boethius seeks will have been found. And so *Philosophia* assures Boethius that the movement of time is an imitation of, and bears some likeness to, that Divine permanent present (5, 6,39–54). As a circle is to its centre, so is reason to intellect, and time to eternity (4, 6,74–78). This assurance—that his temporal rational life imitates divine perfection—makes his consolation complete. For what caused Boethius' despair was the distance between the content of his loves and the method of his knowing them. His consolation answers this despair because it shows that his ways of knowing can be adequate to the good they desire. If each kind of seeing sees truly and

19. It is in the theological tractates that Boethius gives more detailed arguments concerning both the character of the divine self-relation and the character of human freedom in relation to its cause. See Robert Crouse, "The Doctrine of Creation in Boethius, The *De Hebdomadibus* and the *Consolatio*" in *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 417–21, esp. 420. In the reconciling of faith and reason which is the aim of the tractates, there is the same conscious spirit—of activity as prayer—as in the *Consolation*. Consider: "Quod si, sententiae fidei fundamentis sponte firmissimae, opitulante gratia divina, idonea argumentorum adiumenta praestitimus, illuc perfecti operis laetitia remeabit unde venit effectus. Quod si ultra se humanitas nequivit ascendere, quantum imbecillitas subtrahit vota supplebunt," *De Sancta Trinitate* 360–65. Human nature requires prayer, but its activity can itself be that prayer. Compare "illuc perfecti operis laetitia remeabit unde venit effectus (the joy felt for the finished work will flow back to the source whence its effecting came)" with "nisi converso rursus amore / refluxant causae quae dedit esse (unless by means of love which has turned back they flow back to the cause which gave them being)." See also Robert Crouse, "*Semina Rationum*: St. Augustine and Boethius," *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 75–86, esp. 79–84.

20. See note 19 above. In the *Consolation* Boethius explores neither the technical language necessary to describe the self-relation of God nor the problems which this theology raises for God's essential unity. He would have us admit both that God's self-relation must include nature and humanity and that God must be beyond all division as necessary theological principles.

in a way adequate to itself, the unity Boethius seeks is present throughout the levels of his soul.

The reflection of the early books, on the true object of Boethius' desire, is thus a reflection on his own movement through time, his past loves, present as the content of his memory. By thinking about what he has been, he is able to come to a knowledge of what he seeks. This knowledge is by nature self-reflective. Self-reflection (the thinking of one's life, one's being) brings the self to face its principle as the good that moves its desire. This good is therefore the necessary unity that all division presupposes because it is the moving end in each finite activity. Because all forms of seeing are intrinsically related to the highest good, the temporal life does truly possess the good. The life that Boethius at first laments is therefore the same life which he later sees to contain a complete happiness. Desire is thus shown to be the concrete activity of God Himself in the self that moves toward him. In the manifold pursuits of the self the unity of the divine is present with a fullness and joy. For Boethius, happiness is found when he knows all the levels of his soul actively participate in it that happiness, when he knows his life to contain its end.

Philosophia effects this movement inward and upward.²¹ Strangely, however, after she clears his eyes and he has recognized her as the teacher of his youth, he nonetheless does not understand why she would come to him in the midst of his sorrow and humiliation. It seems wrong to him that she, as *magistra* of virtue, be associated with his shame. She replies that it is because he is suffering on account of her name, as her student, that she has come to share his labour and help bear his burden.²² What it means that he suffers on account of her name is that he has been punished, imprisoned, and sentenced to death for the virtuous behaviour she instilled in him in his youth. It is, therefore, her love for him (as student) that forms his love for her (in virtue) which, in turn, prompts her return to his side. Though he forgets her, she remembers him. The fidelity between Boethius and *Philosophia* is the basis for her consoling of him; it is also what this consolation aims to restore to him.

She says "it could not be right that Philosophy should leave an innocent man companionless on the road."²³ From our consideration of the different kinds of seeing in the human soul, we know that in its restoration each kind

21. Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Ad intellectum ratiocinatio; Three Procline Logics; The Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*," *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): 244–51, 246.

22. "An, inquit illa, te, alumne desererem nec sarcinam quam mei nominis invidia sustulisti communicato tecum labore partirer?" 1, 3,9–11.

23. "Atqui Philosophiae fas non erat incommittatum relinquere iter innocentis" 1, 3,11–12.

of seeing leads to the one above it. This restoration, however, does not happen by chance. Rather, it is the result of *Philosophia's* method, the fruit yielded as she tends to his soul. In this she is the companion who makes the soul's journey possible. She brings him to his homeland under her guidance (*ductu*), on her path (*semita*) and in her carriage (4, 1, 33–36). Indeed, her ambiguous stature confirms that she is what is prayed for: the vision of God as leader, pathway, and end. Because she is with him, above him and within the divine itself (1, 1, 8–12), she is able to show him the fullness of the divine life in the division and sorrow of his own. She reveals what is hidden – the presence of the good at each level of his soul – and therefore mediates his relation to his happiness. She interprets him to himself; smiles, sings or speaks, in such a way that he can see himself through her. Her work is thus the work of conversion: to bring the self to a knowledge of its loves and a willing of them.²⁴

Is this mysterious lover internal or external, human or divine? In the dramatic movement she appears to the character Boethius as grace itself, external and beyond his immediate activity. Yet Boethius is also author, and writes the drama not according to authority but according to reason alone.²⁵ This ambiguity in her nature is essential because her consolation of Boethius is both the work of God and the free activity of the prisoner. She is divine Wisdom and temporal human thinking. She is not one *or* the other of these; “she is simply *Sapientia*, who can lift her head to pierce the very heavens.”²⁶ In the ambiguous stature of Lady Philosophy, in this relation between the character and the prisoner, one has a sense of what his consolation is. Her love for him awakens him to the awareness that each level of his personality is a reaching upward; that his thinking itself, like the activity of his senses and imagination, has present to it the end that he seeks. The whole personality, in all levels and at each moment, is a kind of prayer, an awareness of

24. What is present here is a confidence not only that the world is in God but also that God is in the world. See Colin J. Starnes, “The Theology of the *Consolatio*,” *Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed Luca Obertello (Rome, 1981): 27–38, 34.

25. On the relation between reason and authority in Boethius see Robert Crouse, (*op. cit.*); J.A. Doull, “Augustinian Trinitarianism and Existential Theology,” *Dionysius* 3 (1979): 111–59, esp. 151–52; W.J. Hankey, “The Place of the Psychological Image of the Trinity in the Arguments of Augustine’s *de Trinitate*, Anselm’s *Monologion*, and Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Dionysius* 3 (1979): 99–110.

26. Crouse, “The Doctrine of Creation in Boethius” 418: A fuller quotation reads: “Lady Philosophy is not natural *or* revealed, not philosophy *or* theology; she is simply *Sapientia*, who can lift her head to pierce the very heavens. She is not a Platonist *or* an Aristotelian, a Stoic *or* a Neoplatonist: conflicting schools have violently torn away fragments from her vesture, yet she stands with unabated vigour. She is simply wisdom, old and young, all philosophy, which in its highest speculative form is called theology,” 418.

itself as love turning, flowing back again to its origin, as freedom and end. *Philosophia* weaves her dress, and on it she weaves the ladder Boethius ascends through the free movement of his soul. As she weaves the soul together, she weaves its way to God.